

**INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM**

**NHDHR INVENTORY # STM0086**

**Name, Location, Ownership**

1. Historic name Old Stratham Town Hall
2. District or area Town Center
3. Street and number 151 Portsmouth Avenue
4. City or town Stratham
5. County Rockingham
6. Current owner David Short

**Function or Use**

7. Current use(s) commercial
8. Historic use(s) town hall

**Architectural Information**

9. Style Second Empire
10. Architect/builder C.R. and H.H. Leavitt, bldrs.
11. Source town reports
12. Construction date 1877
13. Source town reports
14. Alterations, with dates 1956 – fire destroys stage,  
slate roof replaced by asphalt?; 1971 – rear addition;  
ca.1997 – vinyl siding
15. Moved? no ☒ yes ☐ date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Exterior Features**

16. Foundation brick
17. Cladding vinyl siding
18. Roof material asphalt shingles
19. Chimney material brick
20. Type of roof mansard
21. Chimney location west interior
22. Number of stories 2
23. Entry location center facade
24. Windows double-hung 6/6  
Replacement? no ☒ yes ☐ date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Site Features**

25. Setting historic town center with modern infill
26. Outbuildings none
27. Landscape features parking lot, overgrown  
evergreens



35. Photo #1 Direction: north
36. Date: September 28, 2016
37. Reference: 1721

28. Acreage 1.46 acres
29. Tax map/parcel # 17/40
30. State Plane Feet (NAD83) X:1185827  
Y:192080
31. USGS quadrangle and scale Newmarket NH 1:24000

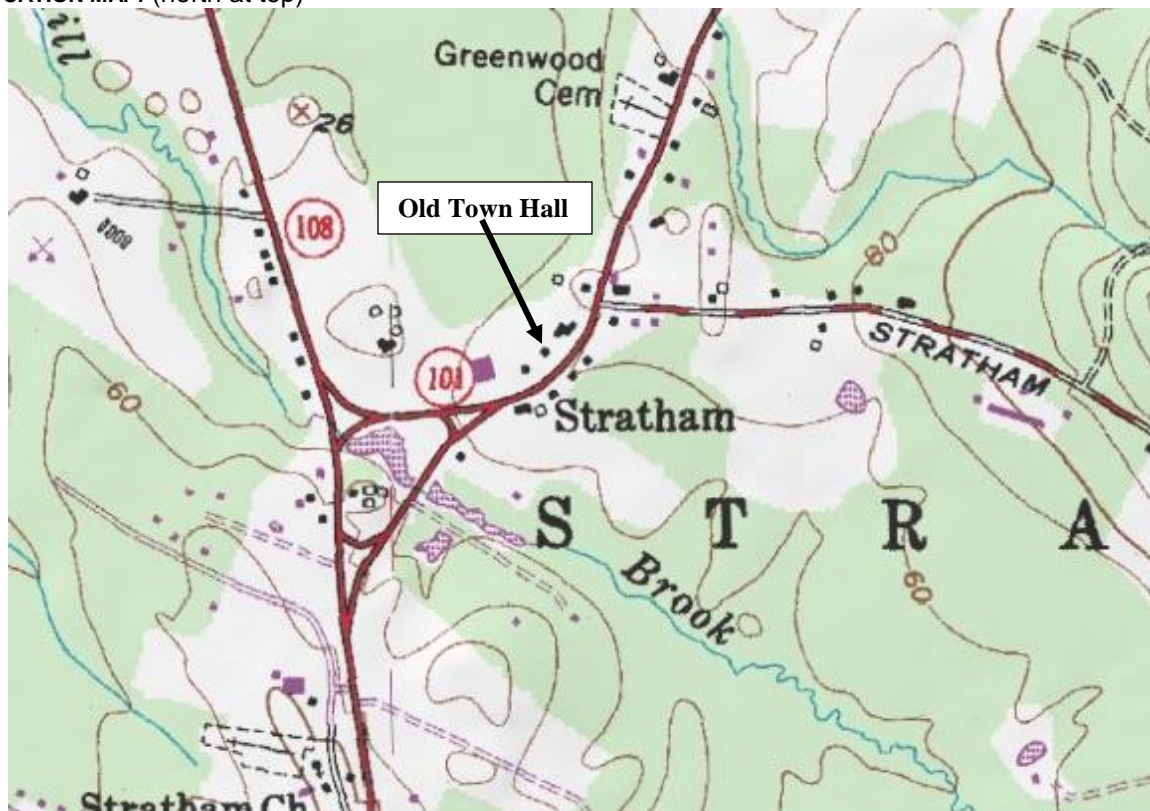
**Form prepared by**

32. Name Lisa Mausolf
33. Organization Stratham Heritage Commission
34. Date of survey September 29, 2016

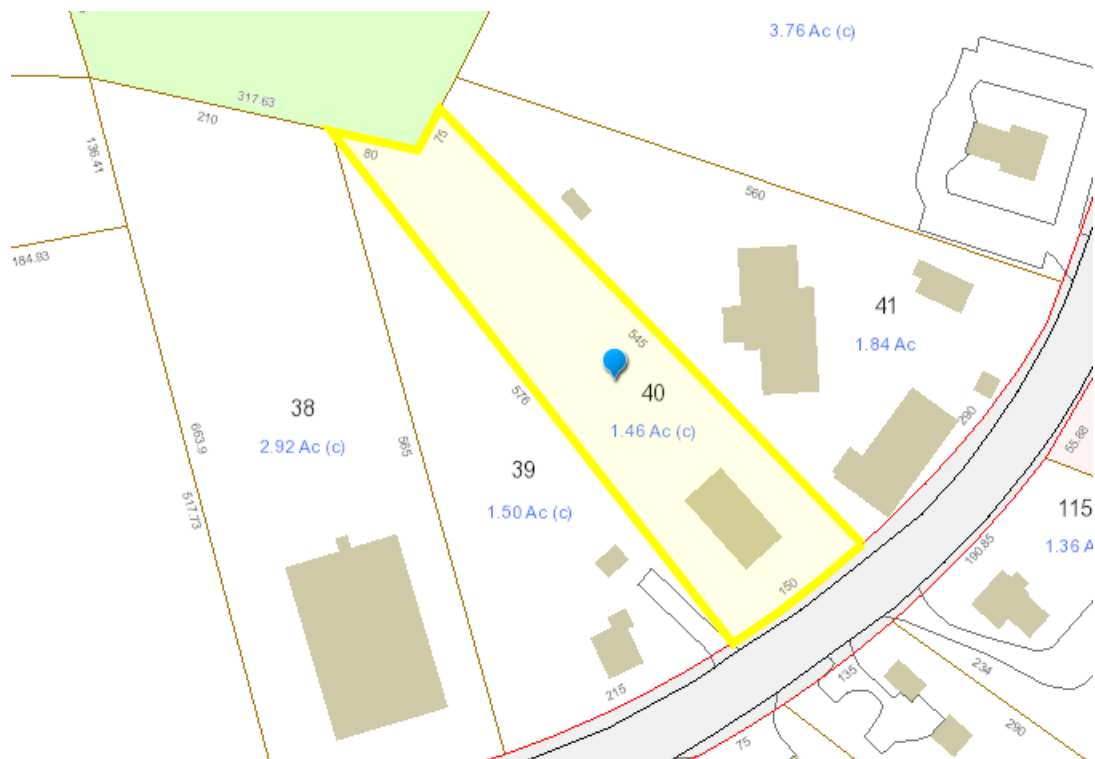
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**39. LOCATION MAP: (north at top)**



**40. PROPERTY MAP: (north at top)**



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### 41. Historical Background and Role in the Town's Development:

The town of Stratham was founded in 1716. What is now Portsmouth Avenue has always been the main street and historic spine of Stratham. Known by various names including the King's Great Highway, it was laid out in 1681 and linked Portsmouth and Exeter. A town center developed where Portsmouth Avenue intersected with roads leading east (the present day Winnicutt Road) and west (College Road/Route 108). For the first hundred or so years, town affairs were conducted in taverns, at the meeting house and in private homes. A new meetinghouse was constructed in 1837 (the present Stratham Community Church, 6 Emery Lane) and the town leased the basement for town offices. In 1838 the space was named Jackson Hall. Discussions regarding building a separate town building began in the 1850s but it was not until the 1870s that serious planning began.

In 1874 town meeting first voted to build a townhouse and appointed a building committee consisting of John Ayers, D.P. Batchelder, C.N. Healey, C.W. Jones and Levi Barker in order to make estimates and locate a site. Charles R. Leavitt was paid \$15 for plans that showed a 40' x 60' building with a lower story to contain a store (storeroom?), selectmen's room, dining and cook rooms. The upper story was to contain a town hall and ladies' and gentlemen's dressing rooms (*Exeter News-Letter*, April 17, 1874). Bringing these plans to fruition was to take several more years as subsequent votes relating to the building of a townhouse were held in 1874 and 1875 to reconsider the project.

Finally, in 1877 the town voted to build a townhouse and raised \$3,500 for the purpose. Josiah B. Wiggin, Freeman H. Burleigh, Otis B. French and James W. Rollins were appointed a committee to present plans, specifications and location (*ENL*, March 23, 1877). Soon thereafter \$300 was appropriated to buy a lot of land from the farm of George Wingate. The lot was located at approximately the midpoint of Portsmouth Avenue, adjacent to the village store and post office and a short distance from the three Stratham churches. Charles R. Leavitt was awarded the contract for the town house (*ENL*, June 1, 1877). By mid-July the frame was in place and it was completed by the end of October (*ENL*, July 13, 1877; Oct. 26, 1877).

The new town house was dedicated on November 28, 1877. A lengthy article appearing in the *Exeter News-Letter* on December 7, 1877 provides a detailed description of the building:

The hall is 40 x 50 feet and 18 feet in height. On either side of the entrance is an ante room 10 x 18 feet; the one on the right being set apart for the use of the town officials. The standing finish throughout the building is of chestnut; the floors are composed of hard pine; the stage is 11 x 15 feet, and is of semi-circular pattern in front. Inside blinds of a light color set off and add much to the beauty of the surroundings. The main room is lighted by a magnificent chandelier, which hangs from the centre. Back of the stage appears two double side lamps, also two single ones upon each of the side walls and two in the vestibule. In cool weather the room will be made comfortable by a furnace situated in the basement. The interior of the structure was finished under the direction of Hezekiah H. Leavitt, of this town, who merits praise for the faithful manner in which the work has been executed. It is the universal verdict that no hall in this section of the state shows better or more tasty workmanship.

Hezekiah H. Leavitt (1844-1918) was a native of Stratham, the son of James Leavitt, a farmer and carpenter. Charles R. Leavitt was his brother, younger by two or three years. The 1875 New Hampshire Business Directory lists both Hezekiah and Charles as carpenters/builders. Hezekiah is still listed as a carpenter/builder in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century although he moved to Portsmouth late in life. Charles R. Leavitt appears to have left the area.

A few weeks after the formal dedication, a dedication dance was held to christen the new hall with music by the Newmarket full quadrille band. Tickets were 50 cents. The festivities also included a grand march and circle headed by Miss Lizzie Leavitt of Stratham and Frank Severance of Boston (*ENL*, Dec. 21, 1877). The Town Hall quickly became an integral part of the community. On Christmas Eve 1877 a festival was held with 500 in attendance. A benefit fair and festival held in February included duets, singing and crafts. Oysters were served in the basement (*ENL*, Feb. 22, 1878). Town reports indicate that the building was utilized by a variety of groups and productions. In 1901-2 the Town received rent from the entertainments, dramas, "sociables" and lectures as well as the Grange, a Dancing School, the Congregational Society, the Christian Society, and the Junior Order of United American Mechanics (Jr. O.U.A.M.), a nativist organization committed to the restriction of immigration and keeping the Bible in schools.

In 1884 a row of horse sheds was constructed at the west end of the lot and in 1888 a room in the basement was finished. In 1897 a room in the town hall was fitted up for the use of the town library. The library had previously been located in the store of A.C. Lane. Initially, the library was located in the basement until a room over the ante room could be finished. In 1899 C.F. Mitchell was paid \$200 to install a steel ceiling in the Town Hall (Town Reports). At Town Meeting in 1904

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warrant articles proposed placing a single electric light in front of the Town Hall and building a lock up in the basement. It is not known if either article carried.

The Town Library remained in the building until 1911 when the Wiggin Memorial Library was built on the corner of Portsmouth Avenue and Winnicutt Road. The Town Hall was wired for electricity in 1913. In 1930 an exit was built on the northwest side of the Town Hall.

In addition to hosting Town Meetings, the Town Hall was the centerpiece of local social life. This role was underscored by the fact that until the 20<sup>th</sup> century Stratham only had one-room schoolhouses. The events held here included suppers, whist parties, dancing classes, moving pictures, concerts, fairs, rummage fairs, auctions, dances, wedding receptions, flower shows, and scouting meetings. In addition to the Winnicut Grange and 4H, fraternal, temperance and all sorts of groups met here including the County Kennel Club, the Rockingham Riding Club, Stratham Civic Association, the Boys Club, the Parents-Teachers Association and countless others. And each year the town report included a line item for the expense of tuning the Town Hall piano.

The old single-story, gablefront Post Office next to the Town Hall was taken down about 1947. In 1955 or 1956 the old horse sheds were taken down and rebuilt for the use of the highway department. On August 10, 1956 a fire that started in the highway department garage behind the town hall spread to the town hall. Thankfully it was confined to the rear of the building and the third floor which was then being used as a Boy Scout meeting hall. Town records were undamaged because they were stored at the town clerk's home and in a small fireproof safe in the building. Two weeks after the fire a special town meeting was held at the school to discuss options. Although razing the building and constructing an auditorium at the school were seriously considered, the various groups using the building advocated for a separate building from the school. Eventually the town garage was built in a new location, a firehouse was constructed behind the library at the corner of Portsmouth Avenue and Winnicutt Road and the town hall was renovated and repaired although the stage was not rebuilt. After the fire, Town Meeting continued to take place at the Town Hall with polls located in the lower hall and discussions in the upper hall.

In 1971 an addition was made at the rear of the building to house the town offices. It also included a larger fireproof safe. The cost of the addition was \$18,000. After the offices moved downstairs, the upper hall was outfitted as a basketball court. Even with the 1971 addition the building was not large enough to serve the town's growing administrative needs. In 1987 the Police Department moved into a trailer at the rear of the property. Other departments including Planning, Zoning and Administration moved to the former Stratham Memorial School on Bunker Hill Avenue in 1991.

The former Town Hall building was subsequently leased to several businesses. In 1997 it was purchased by David Short. It currently houses the Olde Town Hall Antiques, a consignment shop.

**42. Applicable NHDHR Historic Contexts:**

Local government, 1630-present  
Cultural and community traditions

**43. Architectural Description and Comparative Evaluation:**

The Old Stratham Town Hall is a 1 ½-story, 3 x 4-bay, wood-frame structure, set on a high brick foundation and capped by a mansard roof consisting of a hip roof set on a lower roof with straight sides. Originally the roof was sheathed in slate with contrasting rosette designs. It is now covered in asphalt shingles. The removal of the slate likely occurred after a fire in 1956. A brick corbel cap chimney rises from the west portion of the roof. Three dormer windows punctuate the front of the mansard roof. The segmentally-arched double-hung 6/6 windows are capped by arched hoods. The walls of the building are now covered in vinyl siding although the paired brackets at the cornice and the arched window hoods were retained. The vinyl siding was apparently installed after the town sold the building in 1997 and has minimal impact on the building's historic appearance. Historic photographs indicate that the building always had minimal, unadorned cornerboards. The taller double-hung 6/6 wood windows on the main body of the building are protected by exterior storm windows and capped by arched hoods set on two small brackets.

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There are no window openings on the rear elevation of the main block. A single-story, shed-roofed addition (1971) spans the rear elevation. Fenestration on the modern addition includes an overhead garage door and horizontal, hopper windows. On the west elevation there are four 6/6 windows punctuating the basement level as well as a basement entry vestibule (1930) with vinyl-sided walls with 2 x 2-light windows and a gable roof. On the east elevation of the building, a fire door was added at the rear of the first floor and is fronted by open wooden stairs with pipe metal railings. There are four 6/6 windows on the basement level.

Centered on the main façade is a single-story entry porch supported by chamfered posts set on bases with projecting panels and decorated by brackets and an arched span between the posts. The porch has seen several changes since its construction including the installation of turned balusters on the sides and the loss of the original balustrade. The stairs have been rebuilt and the existing glass-and-wood double doors are modern replacements topped by a plywood panel. The original doors had projecting panels and were capped by a transom.

The interior of the building retains a number of historic details. The front foyer is flanked on either side by a small room. The foyer has a metal ceiling and coordinating tinwork also covers some of the lower walls. The double doors leading into the hall have boldly projecting panels (three to each leaf) and there are also other doors with five-panel configurations. The windows have simple surrounds with peaked lintels and the walls display wainscoting as well as later paneling. At the back of the hall, the wainscoting is angled to reflect the former stairs up to the stage. These are the only indications of the former stage which was not rebuilt after the 1956 fire.

A simple wooden staircase leads down to the basement level which also has vertical wood wainscoting on the outer walls. A more elaborate staircase in the southeast corner of the first floor leads up to the attic. That staircase has several types of turned balusters and ornate turned newel posts. The upper level also has wainscoting on the exterior walls. The space was originally open but was later partitioned with drywall into several smaller rooms.

The use of the Second Empire Style was an unusual choice for the Stratham Town Hall, reflecting the latest in architectural fashion. There are no other buildings of this style in the Town. This rather simple version, with its slate-covered mansard roof, paired brackets at the cornice, narrow cornerboards and chamfered porch posts could have been inspired by a pattern book or a similar building in a more cosmopolitan community such as Exeter or Portsmouth. There are similarly no other known examples of Second Empire Town Halls in the immediate area. Centennial Hall in neighboring North Hampton, which was erected in 1876 to serve a similar community hall function, is a much larger, two-story structure constructed in the Stick Style and designed by an architect, J.D. Towle.

**44. National or State Register Criteria Statement of Significance:**

The Old Town Hall is eligible for the State Register of Historic Places with local significance under Criterion A, Social History, for its associations with town government and entertainment/ recreation in the New Hampshire community of Stratham. The building played a vital role in local town government and the recreation of Stratham's townspeople from its construction in 1877 into the late 1980s. This was the location for Town Meetings from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A number of fraternal organizations and groups used the building as their meeting place including the Winnicut Grange, Jr. OUAM, Athletic Clubs, Boy Scouts, Stratham Civic Association, Parent-Teacher Association, 4-H, etc. Under Criterion A, the period of significance extends from the date of construction, 1877, to 1966 (the 50 year cut-off) although the town continued to own and utilize the building into the 1990s.

The Old Town Hall is also significant under Criterion C, Architecture, as a modest but unique local example of the French Second Empire, an architectural style which was rarely, if ever, used for Town Hall structures in New Hampshire. It was constructed by local builder/carpenters Charles and Hezekiah Leavitt. Unfortunately, due to the application of vinyl siding, the building is currently not eligible for the National Register but it is eligible for State Register listing.

A Project Area Form prepared in June 2014 by Preservation Company (Kari Laprey and Reagan Reudig) determined that the buildings in the Town Center do not form a district eligible for the National Register, noting that the buildings are linked historically but do not form a significant concentration and lack continuity because of missing and new buildings. The Old Town Hall was one of several buildings identified for further survey due to its civic importance and integrity.

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**45. Period of Significance:** 1877-1966 (fifty year cut off) – Criterion A  
1877 – Criterion C

**46. Statement of Integrity:**

The Old Stratham Town Hall retains integrity of location, design, and feeling. Its location of setting is somewhat reduced by the loss of adjacent historic buildings and integrity of materials, and workmanship is impaired by the current vinyl siding. It has lost some integrity of association due to its current commercial use. Overall, despite the vinyl siding that encases the building, it retains much of its remaining architectural character and is notable for retaining other period details including a mansard roof, arched window hoods, front porch with chamfered porch posts, a bracketed cornice and numerous interior finishes.

**47. Boundary Discussion:**

The current tax map parcel (Map 17, Lot 40) comprises the boundary of the property eligible for the State Register.

**48. Bibliography and/or References:**

Ancestry.com

Brandon, Craig. *Stratham at 300*. Gilsum, NH: Stratham 300<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee, 2014.

*Exeter News-Letter*, various dates.

LaFave, Helen. *Images of America: Stratham*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998.

Mausolf, Lisa. National Register Nomination for Centennial Hall, North Hampton, NH, 2015.

Nelson, Charles B. *History of Stratham, New Hampshire*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1987, Town of Stratham, NH.

Plan New Hampshire. Stratham Charrette Report, November 2011.

*Portsmouth Herald*, various dates.

Preservation Company (Kari Laprey and Reagan Reudig). Stratham Town Center Project Area Form, June 2014.

Rowe, Joyce. Interview, Oct. 2016 [Town Clerk for 33 years].

Scammon, R.M. "Down the King's Great Highway: A Sketch of Stratham", *Granite Monthly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 3, March 1899.

Stratham Historical Society, photographic collection.

Town of Stratham, Town Reports, various years.

U.S. Census, various years.

**Surveyor's Evaluation:**

NR listed: individual \_\_\_\_\_  
within district \_\_\_\_\_

Integrity: yes (some)   x    
no \_\_\_\_\_

NR eligible: individual \_\_\_\_\_  
individual (SR)   x    
within district \_\_\_\_\_  
not eligible \_\_\_\_\_  
more info needed \_\_\_\_\_

NR Criteria: A   x    
B \_\_\_\_\_  
C   x    
D \_\_\_\_\_  
E \_\_\_\_\_



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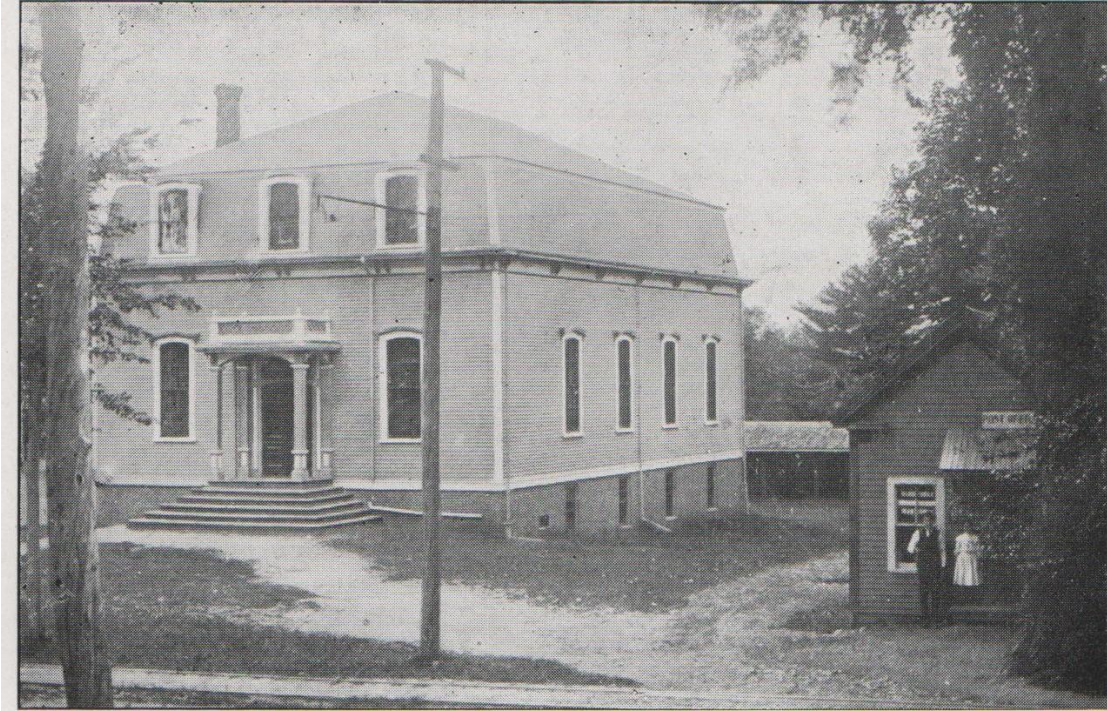


Undated photograph of Old Stratham Town Hall (post 1884)

Source: Stratham Historical Society

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Undated (post 1884) photograph of Stratham Old Town Hall. At right is Post Office and in distance between the two buildings are the rear horsesheds (built in 1884).

Source: Stratham Historical Society



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Undated photograph of Town Hall (note front steps have been reconfigured)

Source: Stratham Historical Society

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Undated (post 1884) view showing Town Hall at left and A.C. Lane Store/Post Office at right

Source: Stratham Historical Society

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Published by A. C. Lane.

The Village, Stratham, N. H.

Undated postcard showing Old Stratham Town Hall at left and A.C. Lane Store/Post Office at center

Source: Stratham Historical Society



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Date photos taken: September 28, 2016



Photo # 2 Description: Rear (north) and west elevations of Town Hall with 1971 shed-roofed addition in front  
Reference : 1663 Direction: SE



Photo # 3 Description: East and north (rear) elevations with 1971 addition at right  
Reference : 1664 Direction: south



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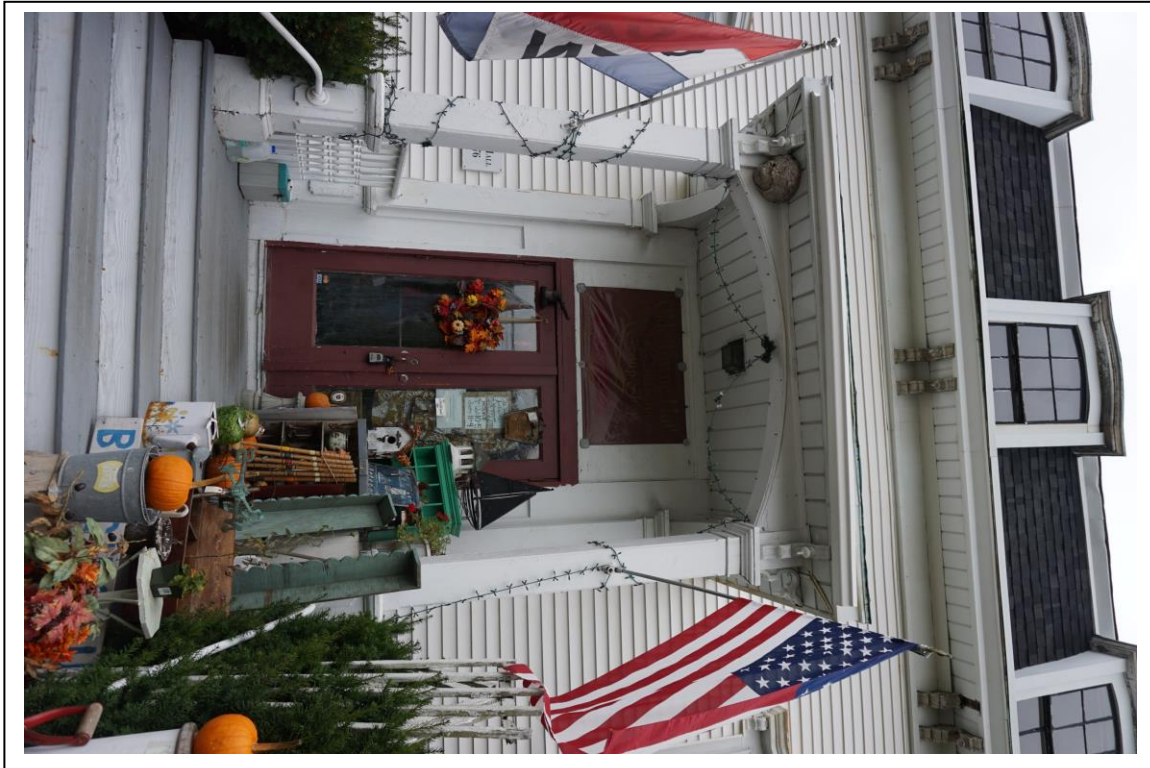


Photo # 4 Description: Detail of front porch  
Reference : 1668 Direction: NW

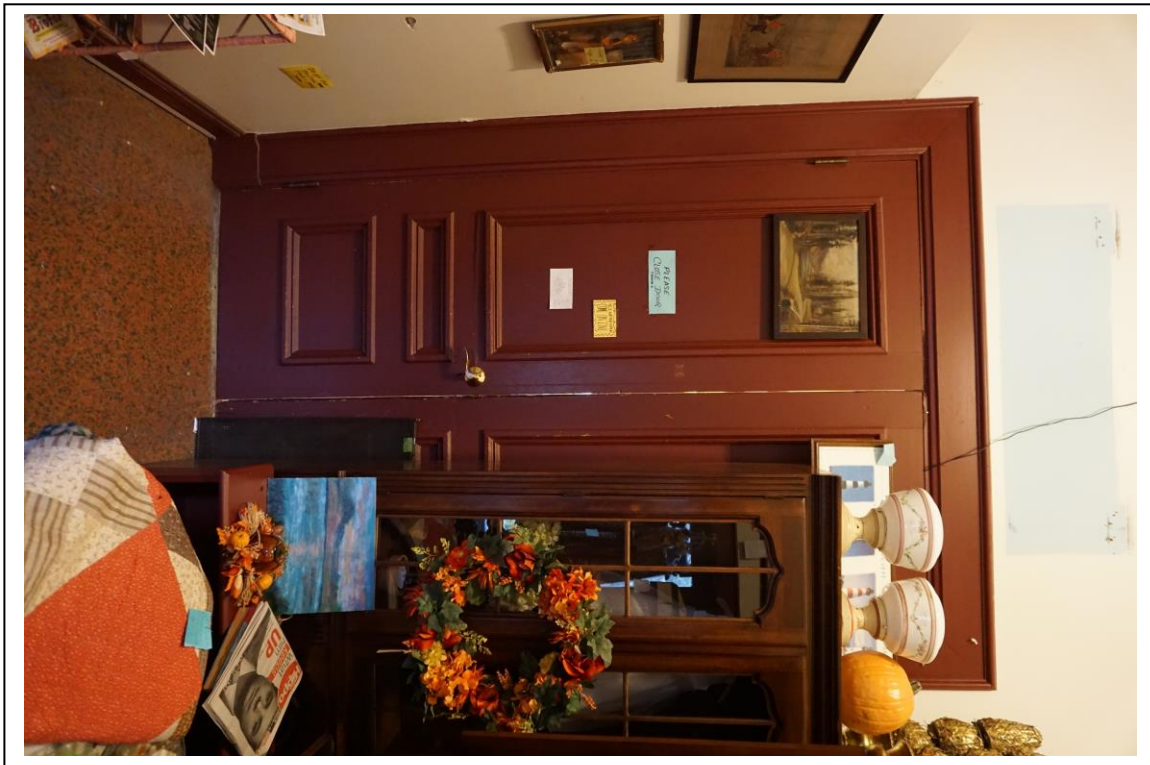


Photo # 5 Description: Doors into hall from foyer  
Reference : 1675 Direction: NW

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Date photos taken: September 28, 2016

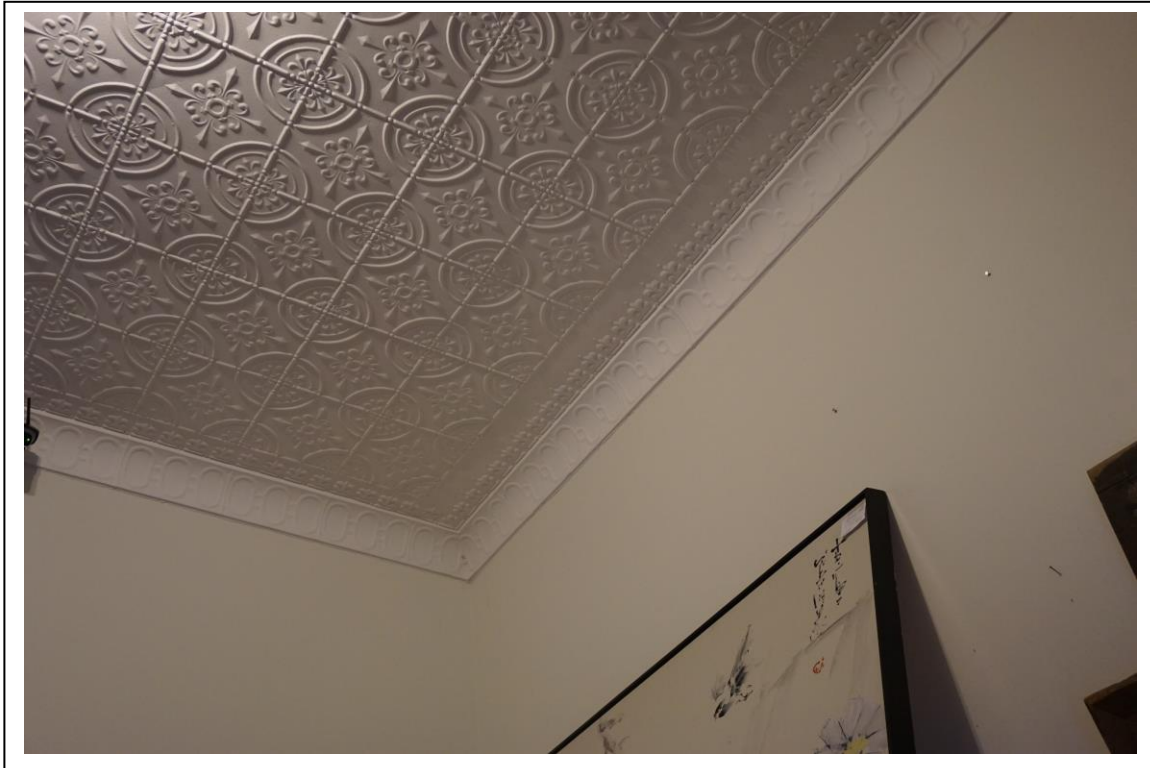


Photo # 6 Description: Steel ceiling in front foyer  
Reference : 1676 Direction: north

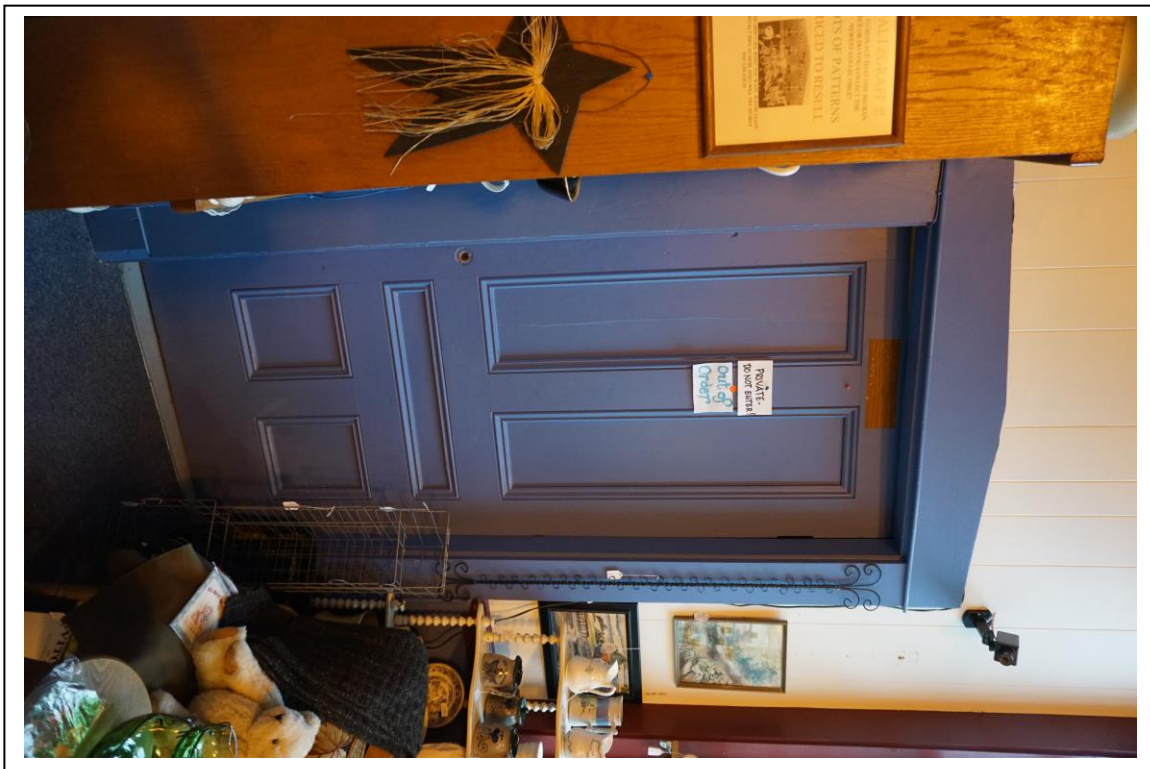


Photo # 7 Description: Original door in hall  
Reference : 1679 Direction: SE



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Photo # \_\_8\_\_ Description: Outline of former stage visible at rear of hall  
Reference : 1683 Direction: NW



Photo # \_\_9\_\_ Description: Interior of hall looking toward entrance at supports holding upper room  
Reference : 1684 Direction: SE

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Photo # \_\_10\_\_ Description: Basement stairs  
Reference : 1691 Direction: east



Photo # \_\_11\_\_ Description: Stairs to upper level  
Reference : 1715 Direction: NE



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Date photos taken: September 28, 2016



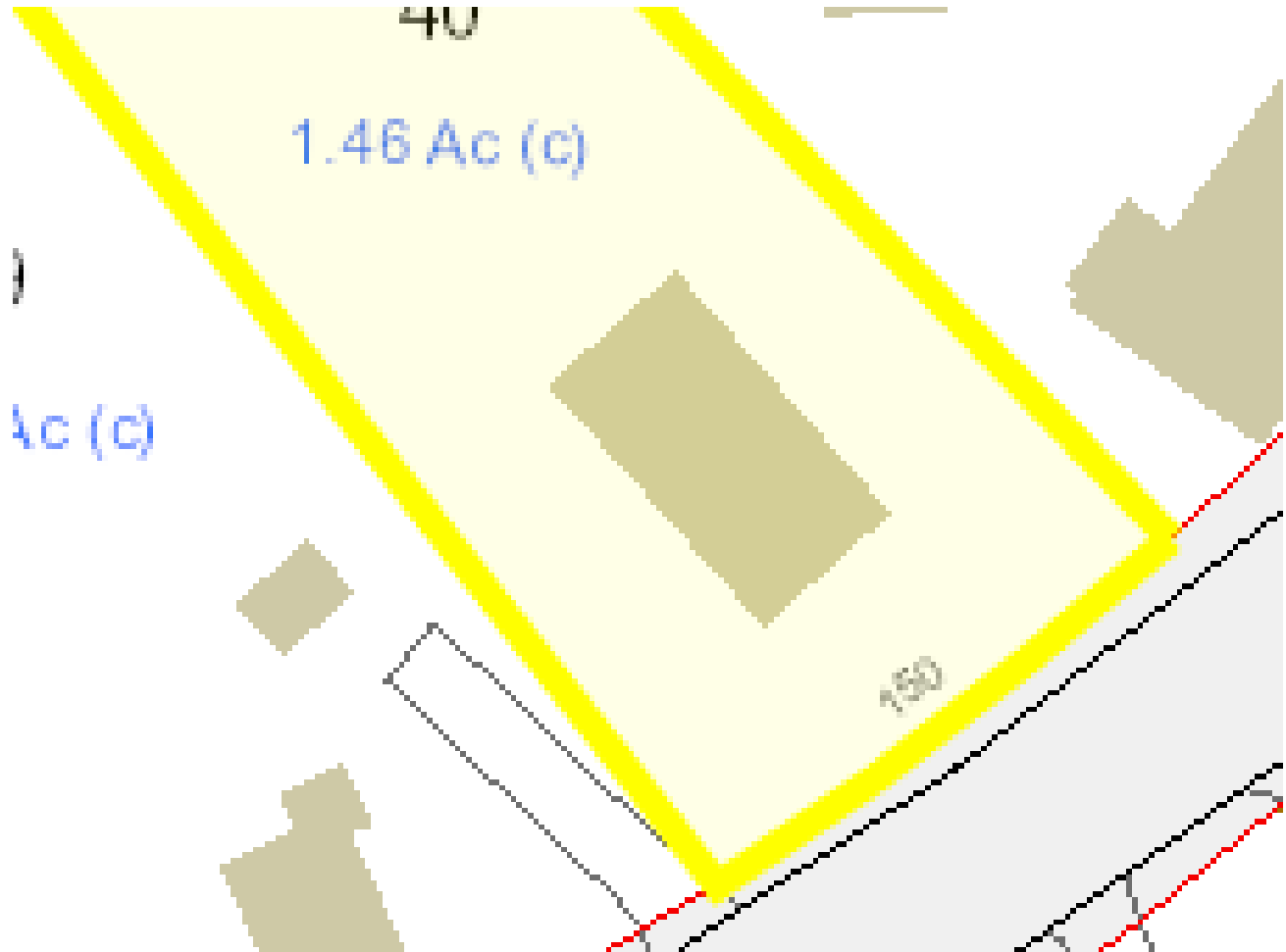
Photo # 12 Description: Upper level, looking south toward front dormer  
Reference : 1709 Direction: south



Photo # 13 Description: Detail, dormer window  
Reference : 1702 Direction: SE

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I, the undersigned, confirm that the photos in this inventory form have not been digitally manipulated and that they conform to the standards set forth in the NHDHR Photo Policy. These photos were printed at Concord Camera in Concord, NH. The digital files are housed at my office in Reading, MA.

**SIGNED:**